EMERGING RESOURCE TRENDS IN THE 80'S[1]

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Nothing is more universally expected of a forestry agency than that it be able to plant and grow high-quality trees. Our future timber supply is directly connected to the sufficiency of our reforestation effort. Most other values of the forest-wildlife, water supply, beauty--are connected with adequate forest cover. So, it is appropriate that we are commemorating the Forest Service's 75th anniversary with a tree-planting campaign.

You know the trends as described in our RPA Assessment--more people, more disposable income, more leisure time, and greater demands on the forests. These trends have already shaped nursery management--there are more nurseries, larger nurseries, more seed sources, speeded-up seedling production, and more sophisticated cultural practices. It is gratifying to look at the nurseries developed in the past two decades--much progress has been made in nursery practices. This progress is one of the key ingredients to the gains we have made in long-term forest growth.

But, more must be done if we are to meet the demands continuing to press on public and private forest lands alike. First, the demand for high quality planting stock will continue to grow. A recent legislative expression of our concern for reforestation is the NFMA's requirement that we budget to eliminate the feasible reforestation backlog on National forests by 1985. By October of 1979, we had reduced the backlog from 3.1 million acres to 882,000 acres--half by actual reforestation, a quarter by land reclassification, and a quarter through natural regeneration. Of this remainder, it is feasible to reforest about 566,000 acres and the proposed budget level for 1981 is sufficient to stay on the schedule of removing this backlog by 1985 if adequate funds are provided in future years. In all cases, we will need first-rate planting stock.

We are expanding our nursery capacity--our estimates show a need for about 269 million seedlings from Forest Service nurseries over the next several years. This will meet our needs as well as those of BIM and other cooperators. There is a huge reforestation job ahead on private lands, too. In the Pacific Northwest and coastal Alaska, more than 75 percent of the nonstocked lands are on highly productive sites. We are particularly concerned about the amount of private, nonindustrial forest land in the South that is not reforested after harvesting--over a 10-year period, 7 million acres of pine forest were replaced by less desirable species or remained essentially unstocked. Our long-term program will provide assistance to motivate landowners to reforest and to use genetically-improved stock. Our goal is to nearly quadruple the amount of private-land reforestation each year. We are working with the Dept. of the Treasury to analyze tax incentives to encourage landowners to reforest their lands.

[1] Speech presented at Intermountain Nurseryman's Association, Western Forest Nursery Council, Joint Meeting, Boise, Idaho, August 12/13/14, 1980.

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A second trend is the growing complexity of nursery work--tailoring seed sources and seedling characteristics to site requirements and to meet the diverse needs of wildlife, esthetics and energy production. The complexity of nursery work will probably prompt increased computerization, greater specialization and the growth of Nursery staffs. Third, nursery management is becoming world-wide in scope--nurserymen search the globe for the materials or knowledge needed to improve forest in their own nations.

A fourth trend is the growing importance of nursery research and the application of research results. Research can help develop cost-saving cultural practices or equipment, or ways to protect expensive plant materials from insects, disease or other damage. Conferences such as this are immensely valuable in getting this research knowledge into practice.

The trends of growing demand for the quantity and quality of seedlings, the increased complexity of nursery work, broadening international interest, and continuing scientific progress add up to a decade of immense opportunity and challenge.